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WESLEY'S GHOST LAID,

AND

THE SPIRIT OF WHITFIELD QUIETED.

BY EXPLORATOR.

IN the evening of Thursday the 13th of August last, an individual was seen walking through the streets of Bristol with downcast eyes, and every appearance of alarming anxiety. It was not easy to say where he had been, or what gloomy forebodings were then distracting his mind. He moved along as if nearly wasted by exhaustion, and now and then exclaimed, "I am Scrutator, the guest of a congregationalist! I am going to my lodgings." As was to be expected, this singular personage soon excited general attention. Men and boys followed him in crowds,—some laughing at his apparent folly, and others listening to hear what he had to say. I mingled with the rest, and approached as near as possible to the excited gentleman—not to mark his countenance, for that did not concern me, but to learn the subject of his thoughts, and the cause of his too painful feelings. For some moments he was lost in thought, and regardless of all that passed around him; then he awoke from his reverie, and said, "This state of things is awfully affecting, for it is indicative of extensive religious declension, a source of triumph to the prince of darkness, a cause of rejoicing to his emissaries, and a token of culpability in those who profess to be labourers together with God." There is, I thought, something affecting in the state of Christian churches, but *this man* will do little to improve it. He must first go and learn of Christ. *His* words were "*full of grace and truth.*"

As Scrutator spoke, the crowd listened with evident

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interest ; but did not know what to think of him. One said, " how excited the gentleman is." Another exclaimed, " his voice is harsh." A third, who stood near me, then said, " Does any one know where the stranger is going ?" No one returned an answer, till the object of interest himself replied by stopping at the house of a respectable citizen. The people fell back, and he entered undisturbed. By a little management I also obtained admittance, and was kindly allowed to place myself in a favourable position for seeing and hearing everything. After the usual salutations, supper was served, and the friends enjoyed themselves in each other's society. For a few moments gloom and care were gone,—at least, nothing I heard told me of sorrow.

When supper was over, the two friends drew near a three-legged table that stood in the middle of the room. A book was opened ; but the visitor was not disposed to read. His countenance saddened, and all the anxiety returned that I had before witnessed. Unable to restrain his feelings, he said he had heard most sad things concerning the church, and that conversions had been few both in Britain and America." I called to mind *many cases of conversion* that I had heard of, and *some* that my eyes had seen. Still, I thought, " the world lieth in wickedness," and each should ask himself, *What have I done for Christ?* Influenced to some extent by the gloominess of his guest, the congregationalist gave expression to thoughts that appeared to me *too sad*, and **NOT JUSTIFIED BY FACT.** He spoke of ministers (making but few exceptions) as actuated by most paltry motives—unwilling to brave persecution—lovers of filthy lucre—forgetful of souls —enemies of the cross of Christ." Calling to mind the toil, stones, brick-bats, and rotten eggs, in spite of which Wesley and Whitfield preached the Gospel, and forgetting that these things were endured of *necessity, not of choice*, he exclaimed, " Spirit of Wesley, descend ! Spirit of Whitfield, descend ! ! " and his guest, even still more excited, said, " Amen ! amen ! amen !"

Immediately the clock struck twelve, and at that hour of ghosts and spectres imagination performed its part. I looked, and saw near the table a picture of horror. The host, with eyes directed to the door, was falling from his chair; and Scrutator sat looking with the wildest gaze, lifting his hand, as if to cool his too excited brain. The door was closed: no one had entered: yet I heard a voice say, "A ghost! a ghost! an apparition!" I looked, but saw nothing ghostly, till the lips of the self-frighted friends began to move. One said, "I am Wesley, and bring a message from God to you!" The other exclaimed, "I am Whitfield! and, what thou seest and hearest from us write in a book and send it to the churches." Strange transformation this of men to ghosts. The spectres then proceeded, and, as if of set purpose, alternately referred to things connected with the church. Throughout they seemed to talk to some one, though themselves alone were present.

At first, I hoped to hear some thoughts that would elevate my nature and bring me nearer to the heaven I love. They spoke of bliss, and said "the prosperity of the church-militant is the cause of triumph to the church in heaven. Does not He rejoice who for the church shed his blood, when sinners enter into its fellowship, and when the members of his mystical body are eminent for piety, peaceful, and harmonious, and actively striving together for the faith of the gospel? Do not angels rejoice at such a scene?" I drank in these words, and felt that they had charms, because according to the word of God. I could have sat all night if they had spoken thus; but it did not suit them to do so. At once the tone was changed. They said, "The church is fallen fast asleep, and all but dead." To me this seemed a *morbid view*—not real, but fancied. I thought, and thought—yet could not feel that all they said was true. I turned to Europe, with its heavings and outbursts of spiritual life; I passed to Asia, where the gospel works in silence, yet with power; I went to Africa, where its sable sons have felt the love of Christ, and sweetly

sing of home ; and then I looked across the Atlantic, to mark their holy zeal and heaven-born love. I could have exclaimed, all is **NOT** *dark and sad!* My thoughts were interrupted by " sounds of mourning, and by peals of horrible laughter." This I could only attribute to the effort of excitement in the ghosts to spend itself.

From this time the conversation assumed even a gloomier cast, and almost led me to cry out, *you are no heavenly visitants.* Spirits from a brighter world would be full of love—a love that " doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, thinketh no evil, believeth all things, hopeth all things," (1 Cor. xiii. 5—7,) but such is not your case. However, I resolved to listen to the end.

Looking with wildness, as if on vacancy, the spirits said, " We charge the church with formality and hypocrisy. The giving of money, the decoration of temples, and the removal of chapel debts, are not always a mark of true religion. Guilty men ! you present religion to the world as a mere system, and cause it to be regarded by the carnal as a stepping-stone to worldly interest." " Again," they added, " where is that brotherly love for which you account yourselves to be distinguished, and which your ministers so frequently inculcate from the pulpit." I attribute these remarks to both ; for, though one only uttered them, the other nodded assent.

I thought they spake as if authority were theirs, and Heaven had sent them to reform the church. Strange dream of brains excited ! If God were with them, would they mingle good with bad, and call the noble deeds of liberality but splendid sins ? Would they overlook the self-denying love that goes from door to door with tracts, visits the cottage of the poor, and pours the balm of kindness into afflicted hearts ? I called to mind what I myself had witnessed,—what my heart had felt at seeing works of mercy, and I blessed the Lord that, though there are some sordid, selfish, faithless men, (and *when was it not so ?*) there yet exist *many heaven-born spirits*, anxious to labour

and to bless the world. Here my thoughts were broken in upon by Wesley's ghost.

He said, with excited utterance, "Yes, and all that love of worldly honour, splendour, and wealth, of which the methodists are so very fond, shall pass away! It shall soon burst as a bubble. You may build your centenary hall, and your college, with their internal and external decorations, and say, our wisdom and our own might have procured us this grandeur and wealth; but know that you have been consecrating the people's money to a paltry purpose. Guilty men! is it a time for you to dwell in ceiled houses when the spiritual temple of God lies waste?" I could not refrain from saying, HOW UNLIKE WESLEY! His sainted spirit knows that the church requires a *prepared* as well as separated ministry, (*this he sought to secure in life*,) and that the hall was not built, but purchased *at the cheapest rate*, and then made to be one evidence how God had blessed his people. Wesley does not forget the age of Christ, when even apostles had to travel with their Master and learn of him, before he said, "Go, teach all nations." He sees that few, if any, ought to pass *at once* from making nets, from the receipt of customs, or from any other trade or calling, to the care of souls; and, unlike Scrutator, he sees in Bishopsgate, at Richmond, and at Didsbury, no mark of selfishness, but of love to God and souls.

The ghost still speaks: "Again," he says, "you are extremely eager after empty vanities—how to collect the power and splendour of wealth around your altars, by striving to enlist on your behalf the rich of the world, and elevating them to stations or offices from which their liberality may be made to flow as a river." It seemed as if, at this moment, a heavenly voice fell upon my ear. I listened, and heard these words: "Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers." (Isaiah, lxix. 23.) "They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from *the least unto THE GREATEST OF THEM*, saith the Lord." (Jer. xxxi. 34.) My spirit was refreshed,

and my heart said—then it IS NOT WRONG to make wealth, rank, and power, bend at the cross of Christ.

On looking at the ghost, I saw his face had lost nothing of its wildness. His head turned this way, and now that, as if to find some object on which to rest the eye, but everything, through its too-jaundiced influence, seemed changed and sad. He spoke—pardon me, reader, if I write his words :—“ Some of your ministers,” he said, “ are restless for titles conferred by man, forgetting that honour which cometh from above. They earnestly covet diplomas of divinity, and to obtain them are willing to cross oceans ! Then what eagerness every Conference for the President’s chair—what strife—what foolish emulation ! ” “ Look also,” he added, “ at your pride of dress. Oh, what a change ! Look at your members, and your congregations, and say whether they can be exceeded in any other quarter for gay apparel ? ” I thought what an odd mixture of diplomas, church government, and dress ! But I soon ceased to wonder, on remembering that the speaker was only a fancied ghost. Knowing a little of the ghost’s allusions, I could have whispered in his ear, the gentlemen who crossed the ocean did so to obey the church, and at great personal inconvenience ; the office of President of the Conference is *no sinecure*, and has been filled by men whose talent and influence prepared them to command. Shall not stern integrity and worth be honoured ? While doing this, I would have added, the church may learn a lesson from the ghost on dress, and should avoid, on the one hand, all that is foolishly expensive ; and, on the other, that which is so singular as to excite a laugh.

Scrutator did not allow me time to whisper this, before he exclaimed, “ Heaven also disapproves of your arbitrary and dictatorial spirit ! The apostolic writings declare that all believers must have equal rights and privileges. But yours is an exclusive system. No private member has a voice in your assemblies. The hundred, and a chosen few, are the lords over God’s heritage, and proud are they of the eminence which they occupy, and tenacious of the power which they

wield." I thought, is there not here something of disappointed pride? This so-called Wesley speaks not as Wesley did. Was it not *he* who named the hundred, and gave them their powers? While I was pursuing these thoughts, there were evidences of great excitement. The voice of the ghost became loud and awful, and when I would have asked for proof that the Conference have forgotten the headship of Christ, and "that all they are brethren," he said, with Stentorian loudness, 'I solemnly call upon the Methodist body to regard such a spirit as one great cause of their little success, and I warn them that if it is persisted in, it will grind them to powder.' Everything denoted the approach of a paroxysm; nor could the hysterical sound of the voice be misunderstood. "Immediately there was a murmuring noise." I listened, and heard these words:—"What cause is there for these harsh admonitions? Some must have power and rule, and let him who strives to obtain it and succeeds, possess it." The spectres gazed at each other, and said, "This is the voice of Diotrephes! - Avaunt! thou must have the pre-eminence no more. Go, rest in thine own place!" I looked, but saw only the excited friends, and then said, "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing." (James, iii. 10.)

As was to be expected, this painful excitement produced its sad effects. The ghost of Wesley gave utterance to the wildest follies, and spoke in words that can only be believed by those who know little of reason, or are ignorant of passing events. He said, "You have been making attempts to divide your circuits, and why? To prevent you from travelling so far, and to increase the number of stations, where you may locate your sons, whom you have consigned to the ministry, irrespective of natural talent, a desire for the work, eminent piety, and the call of the church, (not of parents,) as the pre-requisites of preaching the Gospel." After this ghost had done, his friend echoed what he had said, though with less of frenzy. I thought, what spirit can possess these men? They *pervert facts*, and

attribute motives *that do not exist*. The sons of ministers are *not* received without reference to piety and talent, and, in meetings where they are examined, *the greatest care* is taken lest anything should be substituted for the grace of God, and a divine call. The poor are not despised, but loved and felt for. A division of circuits and an increase of ministers are asked, not to avoid labour, but to direct that labour most efficiently ; that the poor may be cared for; that the young may have instruction ; that all the sick may receive the visits of those who minister to them in holy things; and that the people generally may feel they have pastors **AMONG THEM** who *think, feel, and care for* the flock. No spirit but one from beneath would seek to frustrate designs so pure and heavenly.

Assuming a self-important and not very becoming attitude, Scrutator added, "I have somewhat more against the Methodist body. You are always hankering after the established church, one of the great corruptions of the world, and the very relic of popery itself ! Yes, you would be glad to have its forms and ceremonies (not forgetting its emoluments) transferred to you." I could not refrain from saying, This man calls himself friend; but *where is his friendship?* Better is open hate than well-dissembled love ! The Methodists have always been ready to oppose corruption, and none can say they have been inactive in the cause of Christ. True, they have remembered *their origin*,—but is that a sin ? They have read their founder's cautions — oft-repeated cautions — against party spirit, and resisted attempts to draw them from duty and love. They have weighed his all but dying advice with reference to the English Church, and they cannot curse her, even at the wish of ghosts. It will be our delight to promote her piety and peace. Methodism, as at the first, is still, *the friend of all and enemy of none*.

" Again," said Wesley's ghost, " many of you despise that useful band of men, local preachers ! You underrate their talents ; you forget their usefulness ; you assign to them great labour, long journeys, without any

remuneration ; and where is the equity of such proceedings? You are greatly indebted to them, along with your class-leaders and Sabbath-school teachers, for that little measure of success which has attended you." I thought, while hearing this, what spirit of discord would this man invoke ; and why? He wishes others surely to be excited like himself and host! But no ; it will not be. The friends he names are loved as helpers in the vineyard of the Lord, and honoured for their works. The priesthood, *as he calls them*, look to their teachers, leaders, and preachers, for willing service, *the result of love to God and man*. It would pain me to think they render reluctant labour in their Saviour's cause. I will not dishonour them by thinking so!

Still in my concealment, I heard a voice unnatural and loud as thunder; not, however, like anything that comes from heaven. It said, " Oh, what is the character and state of the ministry. It is awful to know how many have entered the Christian priesthood, impelled by mercenary motives! The Redeemer might address them as he did those in the days of his flesh : ' Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.' Another Scripture," he added, " is applicable : ' And it shall come to pass that every one that is left in thine house, shall come and crouch to him for a piece of silver, and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priest's offices, that I may eat a piece of bread.' " While the spirit was speaking, I called to mind that one said against poor Job—" Doth Job serve God for nought?" I also remembered that Scripture was quoted in the wilderness, to tempt Christ. Then I asked myself, whom have I just heard?

These words had not escaped my lips before the ghost of Whitfield exclaimed, " What an account will such covetous ministers have to give? One," he said, " will have to answer—The vanity of my parents led them to educate me for the ministry. Another will answer—My own vanity influenced me. Another will say—It was my own conceit and arrogance ; having a

large share of native effrontery, I made my way, and was caressed by the people. And many will have to say—We took the oversight of the church for filthy lucre, and not of a ready mind.” The ghost of Wesley here intruded himself. He said—“ Many in the sacred office are proud and overbearing. Mark how they shun to meet the sons of poverty. Observe their stately and aristocratical walk. In many instances, preaching is done for mere show; there is an attempt to say pretty things, while the marrow of the Gospel is kept back.” These words were followed by a great shaking of the building, as if caused by an earthquake. I remembered that I had heard of such shaking when evil spirits were laid, so I was composed, feeling sure the ghosts would soon retire.

I thought, the number of idlers in the church is growing less. There are *thousands* of holy men who are NOT vain, conceited, arrogant, or triflers with the word of God and souls. Their ministry is scriptural, therefore pure and impressive. They watch for souls as those who must give account,—visit the poor, (*when too oppressive duties do not hinder,*) and try to make the widow’s heart rejoice. Many such ministers I know and love. They breathe something of the spirit of St. Paul, and shall ere long be crowned with immortal honours. One expression of Ghost Whitfield almost made me smile. He said, “Were there no salaries, there would, in very many cases, be no preachers.” I thought, can preachers live on air? If they are to be separate from secular life, some must maintain them. “The labourer is worthy of his hire.” (Luke x. 7.)

The spirits had not yet discharged their wrath, and I heard words sweet as honey, yet charged with poison. One exclaimed, (the least excited,) “I call upon the priesthood to rejoice at the piety, usefulness, and success of their brethren. Envy in the breast of a minister is regarded by Heaven as a demon dwelling there. I warn the priesthood, too, against that unfriendly spirit manifested by the ministers of one denomination to the ministers of another; and let all possible means

be adopted to lessen, and ultimately annihilate, that sectarianism which has produced such awful mischief in the church of God." I heard this with pleasure, and could have wished the rest had been as reasonable; but the ghost of Wesley was not to be so bound. Full of himself, he said, "The denomination of which I was the founder have been uncharitable and unfriendly with other religious bodies. I never could sanction a spirit so narrow and bigoted." To me, who had never seen ghosts before, it seemed strange that Scrutator should one hour charge the Methodists with being too friendly with a certain church, and then, the next, blame them for want of love: but I remembered it is possible to blow hot and cold with the same breath. The ministers among the Methodists have tried to avoid a sectarian spirit, and they welcome the descent of any messenger of peace.

There was nothing peaceful in the look or action of the friends before me. The spectre of Whitfield became *awfully stern*! Wesley's ghost violently struck the table; the effect of which was most dreadful: the chairs were overturned, and the so-called spirits fell insensible on the floor. On recovering their consciousness, one began to speak of money, then the other joined, and both uttered cries that must have roused the inmates of the house. They spoke of secretaries, of deputations, and of books, with strange confusion; hinting much, but saying little clearly. Some whom they named are able, if the tale of ghosts call for an answer from them, to stand forth and defend themselves. Their names are known, and their actions court the light. The book-room was mentioned. I said, "What charge of selfishness can be levelled here? The profits are *sacredly devoted to the cause of God*." As I thought, Ghost Wesley struck the table, and exclaimed, "Let not the people tamely submit to those who manifest themselves as the aristocracy!" Something restrained me from uttering all I felt; so I only said,—Submit to what? Not submit to give their money to the cause of God? As soon as these words were spoken, a *strange voice* sounded in my ear; its

notes were wild and horrid. I looked and listened, but could only think it was excited Nature in the ghosts making her last great effort.

The ghost of Wesley spoke again, but with subdued tone, and less of wildness, as day approached. I thought, the scene is closing ! Still I saw the working of an evil influence, that *falsely* attributes all the coldness in the church, or nearly all, to ministers. It looked from his eyes, moved in his hands, lived in his words, anxious to divide, to tear, to slay. I opened my Bible, and read, "Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned ; and avoid them." (Rom. xvi. 17.) Immediately the ghosts retired, and were soon lost in darkness.

Thus left alone, I pondered over what I had just heard, and said—The church *will spread and triumph* despite both earth and hell. He who has been lifted up, will yet "*draw all men unto him.*" If asked what is the church's weakness ? I should reply, the absence of love, which " puts the most favourable construction upon everything, and is ever ready to believe whatever may tend to the advantage of any one's character. And when it can no longer believe well, it hopes whatever may excuse or extenuate the fault which cannot be denied. Where it cannot even excuse, it hopes God will at length give repentance unto life." (Wesley's Notes on 1 Cor. xiii. 7.)

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